

Primitive Art Inspires Our Latest Fashions



COSTUMES OF FUR
WORN BY NATIVES OF
SIBERIA, SERVE AS
SUGGESTIONS FOR OPERA
CLOAKS

Trend of Modern Garb in America Turns From Paris Models to Ab- original Types—Change At- tributed to the War

By JOHN WALKER HARRINGTON

Dressed in deer skin shirt and leggings
Richly wrought with quills and wampum.
On his head his eagle feathers,
Round his waist his belt of wampum.

With his mittens, Minjekahwun
With his moccasins enchanted.
—The Song of Hiawatha.

DAME FASHION, accounted to
be a fickle jade, has been
turning her back on Paris
lately and has been copying and adapt-
ing new designs for frocks and gowns
from the most primitive peoples on
this side of the Atlantic.

She has taken Hiawatha's wampum
belt and made it over into a beaded
purse, and she has prescribed that
moccasins are quite the thing to wear
with the daintiest negligee.

Opera cloaks of fur these days look
very much like those which Minnehaha
might have worn to a ghost dance on
a winter evening.

The trend of the hour in modern
garb toward aboriginal types appears
in the textile and costume exhibition
now at the American Museum of Natural
History, the designs of which were
drawn largely from inspiration ob-
tained from the specimens in that in-
stitution. The why of the tendency is
in recent history.

It has been more than five years
since the German armies streamed
into France. The noted men dress-
makers dropped their tapes and put
aside their gay fabrics, shouldered
their rifles and went to the front.
From creators of fashion they turned
to learning the best modes for slay-
ing Germans, and it took them a long
while to again get back to blouses.

City's Principal Industry.

Meanwhile mighty industries in the
United States of America, which
largely depended on designs of French
or European origin, were almost
without models and patterns. The
principal occupation and the leading
trade of the city of New York is the
making of women's wear. Here the
mechanical facilities for the manu-
facture of the garb feminine have
been carried to perfection. Many
thousands of gowns and cloaks and
suits are sent from this busy metro-
politan mart.

"Miss Adele Glau" of the Great Sur-
prise Store of the distant West and her
brothers and sisters of the same call-
ing demanded new styles, and there
was none to give them. It had been
the habit for many years to buy
models of frocks and hats and cloaks
in the French capital and to modify
them to suit the requirements of an
American public. The keynote for all
costumes, whether of original and ex-
clusive design, intended for one per-
son only or for repetition through a
thousand examples, was distinctively
French.

In their dilemma the manufacturers
of the adornments for the head of
the human species groped about them
in every direction for illustrative novelty.
Prof. Henry Fairfield Osborn, presi-
dent, and Dr. F. A. Lucas, director,
told something of this at the opening
of this dress salon of science.

You and I, had we gone on such a
quest, might not have thought of the
Department of Anthropology of the
American Museum of Natural History.
Perhaps we might not have gone to
Dr. Clark Wissler of that division and
asked him what he was showing that
autumn in the way of new patterns
for party frocks and street gowns.

There are those who think of a mu-
seum as a cloister of science. In the
bushy halls of which spectators and
serious minded persons dust fossils and
peruse broken pots redolent of the
sent of the slumbering past, or stick
beetles on cards and moon mightily
over their color variations.

In that red stone pile, beneath one
of its Romanesque towers, was a seat
with a vision. Years before the roar
of the German guns was heard at

Liege Charles W. Mead, unwrapping
the mummies of Peru, had suggested
that from the wonderful and beautiful
fabrics woven by the primitive people
of the Western world there could be
evolved patterns which would be equal
if not superior, to the most romantic
dreams of our modern modistes. One
who discerns what can be done ten or
fifteen years ahead of what his fellow
beings are able to see has a thorn-
path to tread, and that of Charles W.
Mead was not the primrose way.

There came to the aid of the textile
prophet a hale and vigorous disciple,
M. C. D. Crawford, an expert in color
fabrics, and better known as a bril-
liant journalist along technical lines.
His studies of the ponchos and the
faded ceramics found in the graves
of the ancient Peruvians gave him
abundant material for the develop-
ment of a new school of design. A
research associate of the museum he
became a zealous advocate of the
American design for the American
made fabric.

Dr. Herbert J. Spinden, also of the
same department, worked with Messrs.
Mead and Crawford, and he was a
moving spirit in the present exhibition
and is the author of the handbook
which describes its treasures. His
humblest has brought from Central
America many important objects
which aided American artists.

Under the goad of war the manu-
facturers of textiles and garments
sent their designers to the American
Museum to study with Messrs. Mead
and Crawford and Spinden, and to de-
rive fresh impressions and inspirations
from the collections.

Up to that time there had been com-
paratively little original designing in
the United States. The European con-
flict brought aboriginal art back to its
own. Young artists with tractable
minds and with imagination aglow
entered upon this work with enthu-
siasm. The patterns were taken up and
accepted by originators of costly tex-
tiles, and at the present time not only
Americans of fashion but their sisters
overseas are wearing gowns and head-
gear conceived in the spirit of the
Incans and the Aztecs.

Being Sold Abroad.

Domestic goods of this kind are now
being sold in the discriminating mar-
kets of Paris and London, as well as
in New York and Chicago. A new
American industrial art has been born
of aboriginal culture and the modern
mechanical genius, now happily united,
and destined, let us hope, to overlast-
ing wedlock.

The present exhibition was organ-
ized by a committee of manufacturers,
savants and artists and is a remark-
able tableau in which science and art
are the handmaids of industry. It
will be noted by the visitor that the
influences there dominant are mostly
of the New World. The primitive
peoples who inhabited this country
when Columbus first landed in his
frail caravels had inborn artistic per-
ceptions. Their garments were deco-
rated under the influence of imagery
and adorned with the symbols of their
beliefs. The ancient Peruvians wor-
shipped the deities of the streams and
so, in the present exhibition, you
have many designs which show the
fish motif. The conventionalized fig-
ures of sacred cat gods and other
strange forms peer out from the folds
of exquisite fabrics of to-day, as they
did from the mantles of our first
Americans.

In that Egypt of the New World,
the great Southwest, the Zunis wor-
shipped the serpent as the god of rain.
It may be seen on their pottery as a
ornament, and it is certainly a pic-
turesque one. This symbol, taken
from these ancient ceramics, has been
adapted to modern embroideries of
which there are several now on dis-
play.

Even before the Aztecs had gained
control of Mexico there dwelt in Yu-
catan a wonderful race, the Mayas,
high in civilization and in culture, and

some idealistic authorities believed
to have been on this continent through
the sinking of a lost Atlantis. Here
is a Maya pot of exquisite form and
decoration, which may have been
made long before the Italian explorer
gave this new world to Castile and
Leon. The figures on this vessel have
been followed in the fashioning of a
pattern for a hanging which is sus-
pended above it.

The Indians of Arizona and New
Mexico especially excelled in the bas-
ketry, into the patterns of which they
put the form of the clouds and the
symbols of wind and rain. Many of
these baskets and trays, which were
used as food containers, and could be
made even to withstand water, have
been of high value to designers. Their
patterns can be used as decorations
especially in the borders of curtains.
Often they give up their figures with-
out change and frequently, too, they
are adapted in many forms.

On this page are shown some close-
up views of modern fabrics which
were actually copied direct from the
primitive models.

At the right and the left of the ex-
hibition, as one enters from the foyer,
may be seen a grouping of Sioux gar-
ments, and on the other Siberian cos-
tumes. The lay figures, which are thus
on parade, are surrounded by blankets
and hangings made by the peoples
whom they represent, and they are
arrayed in the habiliments of their
time and tribe.

Cast your eye, if you will be so
good, upon the Sioux lady of quality,
who is adorned in a deer skin creation
of her own creating. It combines utility
with charm. Deer come about the
size of the garment in which she is
arrayed. The picturesque drapery ef-
fect about the shoulders is due to the
shape of the animal from which the
hide was taken.

Take two skins and stitch them to-
gether, legs and all, and it will be
found that the hind legs make arms
for the top of the dress, which are very
comfortable. The tail can be retained
and used as a tassel, both in front
and at the back. The corsage and
shoulders can then be adorned with
beadwork. The skirt drapes naturally
and evenly to the ankles.

Styles From Polar Regions.

Skins of various kinds, especially
those which hold the natural warmth
of the body well, are employed to
reinforce the proper effects by the natives
of northern Alaska and by the Eskimo.
The latest from Paris indicates that
trousers effects for women's gowns
are still come into vogue. The Eskimo
leader of fashion wears fur trousers
which are cut after a mode which has
been employed for several centuries
in that part of the world. Although
sable and ermine can be obtained,
furs are chosen which are capable of
keeping in the heat. So indefatigable
are the makers of such garb that often
15,000 or 20,000 small pieces of fur are
laid in the making of their costumes.
The museum has in its vaults one coat
of this kind which is valued at
\$30,000.

One would search long and patiently
and find no mistake in the color
schemes of the aborigines whose
modes are followed in this display.
The colors employed by these primi-
tive peoples are primitive, but such is
their intuitive perception of correct hues

combination that they do not err.
When we recollect that the exquisite
rugs which adorn the homes of
wealth are from the looms of half
savage nomadic tribes of Asia, it is
not so strange after all that the
Indians of this continent, without sug-
gestion and without books on art,
should have arrived at such faultless
effects.

The Navaho Blanket.

Traders who went to negotiate with
poor Lo had the idea that he was a
cheap soul who knew nothing of style
and color, and that a little red or gray
flannel would satisfy him. The In-
dians took the army blankets and such
products and laboriously picked them
to pieces, rewove them and recolored
them, and produced the wonderful
Navaho blankets, which are often as
fine as any rug which was the fruit
of Persian loom. Indeed, there is so
much in common between the textile
arts of our Western Indians and those
of Asia that one often wonders
whether the ancient weavers did not
migrate in some unexplained way from
the Eastern regions to this world
which we call new.

On the left hand side of the aisle,
about half way down, is an array of
silks and other fabrics which were
drawn largely from the museum col-
lections. The place of honor is given
to a roll on which there is a scroll-like
design. The original is a blanket which
the Indians got in trade from the
whites and changed to keep it from
becoming an eyesore.

"What an interesting combination,
indeed!" said some Zuni modiste, or
using at least words to that effect.
"These children of the Great White
Father have no taste."

Whereupon the color of the blanket
was altered, and there were sewed
upon it patches cut in this graceful
scroll and embroidered snugly to the
original fabric. Many years later the
ambitious designer comes to the
American Museum, vindicates the ab-
original idea of textile art, and uses this

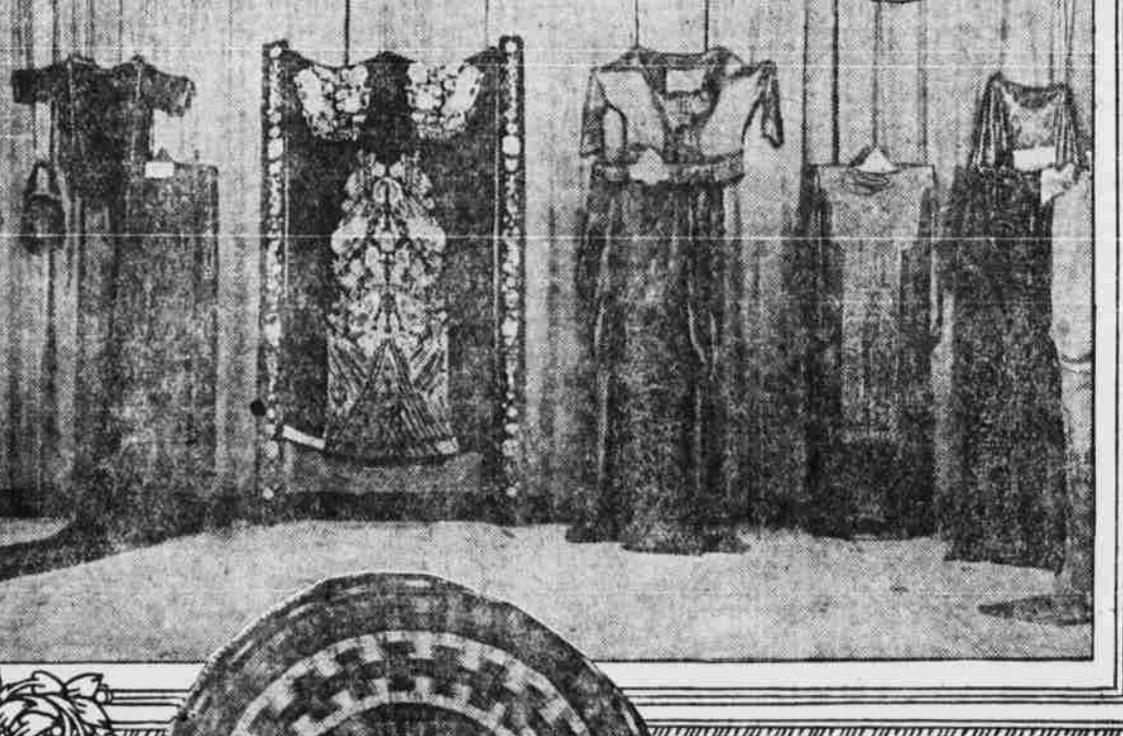


PHOTOS BY AMERICAN MUSEUM
OF NATURAL HISTORY

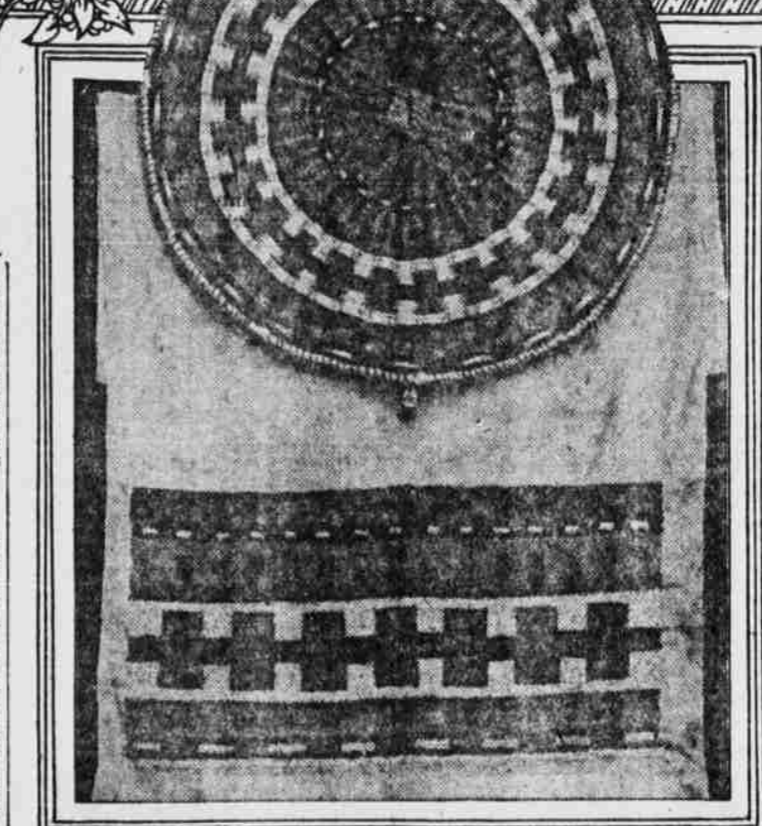
UP TO DATE GARMENTS
CONTRASTED WITH
COSTUMES OF ABORIGINES
and PEASANTS



DESIGNED
by
SIOUX
WOMEN
for
THEIR
OWN
WEAR



BATIKS
BASED ON
THE
PRINTING
ART OF
THE
JAVANESE



TEXTILE DESIGNED FROM BASKET MADE
by SOUTH WEST INDIANS

identical blanket as a basis for a hand-
some piece of dress goods.
In the front of this booth, running
along the edge, is a ledge covered with
a fabric, the pattern of which was
copied from that of a South American
poncho. It bears an image of a
legendary deity of old Peru. The
original was taken from a grave. In
this same display may be seen a dainty
fabric made up of corals and sea-
weed, suggested by an imitation pool
in the museum. Yonder is a graceful
fold which bears an Egyptian car-
touche.

Reindeer Summer Jacket.

Directly opposite is displayed a
grouping of fashionable garments con-
trasted with the simple garb from
which their designs were drawn. Here,
for instance, is a reindeer summer
jacket, with elaborate bead and quill

design at the back, which serves as the
inspiration for a wrap of red velvet,
which, although longer has the same
graceful lines and almost the same
ornamentation. A bolero jacket of
hemp, made in the Philippines, has
been transformed into an exquisite
street gown, and here is an opera
cloak, with its broad stripes and criss-
crossed pattern, which came from the
blouse of a carpenter of the primitive
Ainu tribe of northern Japan. A dis-
play such as this shows how closely
silhouettes and decorations may fol-
low original documents from other
lands and ages, while the finished
products are brought by colors and
materials into the style and quality
of the present.

So much attention has been given
to batik by American artists and de-
signers in the last few years that it
seems indeed a far cry from the

original Japanese product to the
present highly refined and artistic
textiles from the American primaries.
Although the process is popularly ac-
credited solely to Java, it appears in
Mexico, Central America, in western
South America and in the Hawaiian
Islands, where it is employed not only
in the decoration of cloths, but also
in embellishing sounds and pottery.

The design is laid on in wax or any
substance which will resist paints or
dyes, and when the application has
been thoroughly the wax is melted off
and the pattern comes out in the or-
iginal ground color. The American
method has been so developed that it
takes on every hue of the rainbow and,
indeed, does not follow closely upon
the original mechanical processes. The
exhibition and demonstration of it,
given by Misses Ruth Reeves, Hazel
Slaughter, Martha Ryther and Mary
Tannahill, is of exceptional interest in
that it has so many variations of what
was once so simple an art.

The booths given to embroidery
have specimens made by machinery
which were designed after a study of
the crafts of North and South America.

Museums and Embroideries.

"No industry," to quote from a
writer in the handbook of the mu-
seum, "is better capable than the em-
broidery trade, in both its hand and
machine divisions, to profit from the
inexhaustible stores of museums. To
prove this statement we call attention
to specimens with ideas taken from an
African robe, an Ainu coat, a Salva-
dor robe and from baskets of California
and Arizona. All these specimens are
adapted to the trade requirements of
practical, salable and successful ex-
amples of industrial embroidery art.
Notice, too, how far removed some of
the interpretations are from the origi-
nal."

There are also on view lace con-
nected in a general way with the early
processes of knitting and looping
strings to make fishnets and dilly bags,
the moches of Central America, of
South America and of Africa and
Melanesia being commended.

Modern design in silk and cotton
goes through a wide range in this
exhibition which has called into it
the output of looms and of the
printeries where the design is trans-

ferred from cylinders and blocks. The
oldest silk house in the United States
presents silks and broadens after de-
signs by young American artists who
found so much to appeal to their talent
in the art of the original inhabitants
of this continent.

A widely known Chicago house
which specializes in cretonnes pre-
sents refreshing patterns based on the
strong and simple modes of the people
who were weaving and ornamenting
their garb in this country when Paris
was still the Muddtown of the border-
ers.

Ribbon Patterns From Mexico.

Here is a ribbon house, widely
known in the trade, which has put
out a line of its goods with patterns
derived from woven bands used by the
Indians of Mexico.

Two looms are in operation, driven
by electric power, one a Jacquard of
the most approved type, and yet easily
and effectively as they move, others
are to be found alongside on the wall,
examples of the wonderful skill of
primitive man who had no looms and
no power. The first crude implements
are displayed as an illustration of the
wonderful ability of the aboriginal
artists. These hand products, cloths
from Peru with three hundred threads
to the square inch, are practically be-
yond the scope of the machinery of
to-day.

The fashions of the day ordain that
every woman must have at least one
bead bag, and therefore the display
of beadwork based on the designs of
our Indians is drawing an unusual
large number of fondling observers.

When explorers go to strange
lands they always take with them
beads. Many centuries Venice has
been a centre of the glass bead in-
dustry for purposes of barter, and
whether the South Sea Islands were
runacked or the Spanish adventures
of the English colonists came to these
shores they offered the same glass
beads for furs and gold and other
precious stores. The primitive people
of this continent had beads in several
sections at least, which they made
from turquoise pierced byactus
thorns, but the bringing over here of
the European beads practically intro-
duced a new kind of ornamentation.
The Indians of all tribes took it up
with avidity. The pouches, the wam-
pums, the shirt and jacket deco-
rations, all made of beads, soon were
considered a distinctive craft among
them. They found it much more con-
venient to employ these beads of glass
than the tiny shells when they made
their ceremonial belts, which as wam-
pums were almost priceless.

Their arts may have lost in some
directions, but certain it is that the
beadwork of the North American In-
dians was a most creditable perfor-
mance. They found their designs in
the flowers of the prairie, as did Es-
kimo, or in the symbols of the
chase. The aboriginal art in bead-
work and that which has lately sprung from
it are admirably displayed in this
exhibition.

Industrial Art Display.

Those who are especially interested
in the development of industrial art
will find in the southwest hall ad-
joining the main display sketches,
photographs and models showing how
the specimens of the museum are used
by students seeking to be designers.
In cooperation with the Department of
Education of the State of New York,
and with the public schools of the
city, in which James P. Hany who
has charge of the art instruction, has
done much important pioneer work,
the scope of modern art instruction
is well shown.

Much as is the present exhibi-
tion centered about the arts and crafts of
the prehistoric races of the New
World, it has also recognized the in-
fluences which come from other cul-
tures. American textiles are built
made in response to a demand for
something different from the tradi-
tional patterns. It is not enough to
see a smartly attired woman against
a toque trimmed with ribbons of a
design which came from some
Guatemalan, and with a gown which
first worn in Costa Rica, but the
again she may have on a blouse which
is very like that of a Japanese
expert. The modes of dress cannot
be neglected entirely, and indeed, it
will be no easy matter to keep the
fashion centre of the universe, and all
the same there has been a movement
toward the lattermost extremes of
earth. An American industrial art
are creating year by year, and we
are giving expression to it in our
or pans or goblets or any other
object.

In this free exhibition, devoted
to last until November 23, and de-
voted to industrial art, the design
in textiles and costumes, which is
merely that "which is made by the
hand from the stored past, and may
draw much from the employment of
the era of reconstruction.